

Ahu Akivi Celebration, October 12, 2010

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On October 12th 2010, the 50th Anniversary of the restoration of Ahu Akivi was celebrated on Rapa Nui. Members of the Rapanui community, family and friends of the archaeologists and crew members along with visitors all gathered at Ahu Akivi. They came to honor those who worked here 50 years ago and reflect on the importance of this amazingly powerful site. They remembered those who worked on the restoration and shared memories and appreciation. Ahu Akivi's restoration was a crucial milestone in Rapa Nui's modern history and it was valuable to take the time to reflect on what they had accomplished and its importance after 50 years.

Many of the older generation remember the events surrounding the restoration of Ahu Akivi, but many of the young people today have no idea of its history. I have been told that Ahu Akivi had always been standing and others explained to me how big cranes had been used to stand up all the statues now standing on the island. Many do know that my father, Bill Mulloy, restored Ahu Akivi but the important roles of Gonzalo Figueroa and their Rapanui grandfathers are often unrecognized. The way the *ahu* was restored and who was involved seemed a story well worth retelling for this generation.

In the afternoon of October 12th, 2010, an *umu tahu*, a ceremonial earth oven, was traditionally prepared with sweet potatoes and wild chickens to honor those who had worked

at Ahu Akivi (Figure 1). The *umu* was prepared by members of the Rapa Nui music and dance group Vai Te Mihi and after a prayer in Rapanui it was offered to the Rapanui elders who worked on the restoration. Of the 25 islanders who worked with Bill Mulloy and Gonzalo Figueroa on the restoration, only Matsu Hey, Luis Tepano and Mana Ika remain and were well enough to participate in the remembrance (Figure 2,



Figure 2. Luis Mulloy Hey with his father, who worked on Ahu Akivi, Matsu Hey.



Figure 1. Members of Vai te Mihi preparing the *umu tahu* at the 50th Anniversary Celebration.



Figure 3. Luis Tepano, Brigid Mulloy and Mana Ika. Photograph by Cristian Gonzalez.

Figure 3). It may have been the first time in 50 years that there was a ceremonial fire at the *ahu*. People gathered in the plaza in front of the seven *moai* as the fire was built. While waiting for the opening of the *umu*, they played and listened to Rapanui music, reconnected with old friends and shared stories about their experiences and memories of Ahu Akivi. The Sebastián Englert Museum and Mulloy Library staff prepared a very popular outdoor display with enlarged photographs from the restoration work and dedication in 1960.



Figure 4. Brigid Mulloy presenting an Ahu Akivi Anniversary t-shirt to Juan Edmunds.



Figure 5. Brigid Mulloy, Ramon Edmunds and Luis Tepano talking about who worked at Ahu Akivi in 1960.

Many people were wearing their Ahu Akivi Anniversary t-shirts printed with one of the 1960 photographs of the restoration (Figure 4). The shirts and posters were used as invitations to individuals and the community prior to the event. In the weeks before the celebration we talked with people all over Hangarua, showing them photographs of the workers, trying to find out who they were and who was still alive (Figure 5). It was a very rich experience talking with the old men and their families. It was impressive how those who had worked at Ahu Akivi remained very proud of their work and how appreciative they were of being reminded and recognized for their contribution.

A few days after the anniversary celebration at the *ahu*, there was an evening presentation at the municipality. I gave a brief introduction about the importance of Ahu Akivi and Sergio Rapu spoke of his experience as a student going to study archaeology at the University of Wyoming and living with the Mulloy family in Laramie. Carlos Paoa gave a historical multimedia presentation about Bill Mulloy's life and his contribution to Rapa Nui archaeology. Unfortunately, due to technical glitches, we were unable to see Emily Mulloy's short film on the restoration of Ahu Akivi edited by Mateo Rapu, but it was later shown on Rapa Nui TV.

The original work on the restoration of Ahu Akivi started in March of 1960 and continued until October of that year. Bill Mulloy and Gonzalo Figueroa worked with an archaeological crew of 25 Rapanui in several phases of excavation and reconstruction (Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8). It was the first full archaeological excavation and restoration of a ceremonial site on Rapa Nui. This work was done at a time when conditions on Rapa Nui were still quite undeveloped and the island was accessible by ship only once a year. The population of 1400 was almost all indigenous Rapanui. These conditions are a striking contrast to the present situation where planes arrive daily and the



Figure 6. Working at Ahu Akivi, 1960.



Figure 7. Bill Mulloy supervising the placing of the head on a *moai* at Ahu Akivi.



Figure 8. The raising of a *moai* at Ahu Akivi.



Figure 9. The blessing of Ahu Akivi by Padre Sebastián Englert, October 12, 1960. Bill Mulloy and Gonzalo Figueroa with their backs to us, facing Sebastián Englert.

community of Hangaroa is impressively international and less than half of the population is of Rapanui descent.

The original blessing of Ahu Akivi was celebrated at 4pm on October 12th 1960 (Figure 9). The whole Rapa Nui community was invited and many attended, either walking or coming on horseback, because of the distance from the village and the fact that there were only three jeeps on the island at that time. Almost no one, except for those who actually worked on the site, had seen the work as it progressed. The blessing celebration was the first time in 150 years that any Rapanui had seen *moai* standing together on a

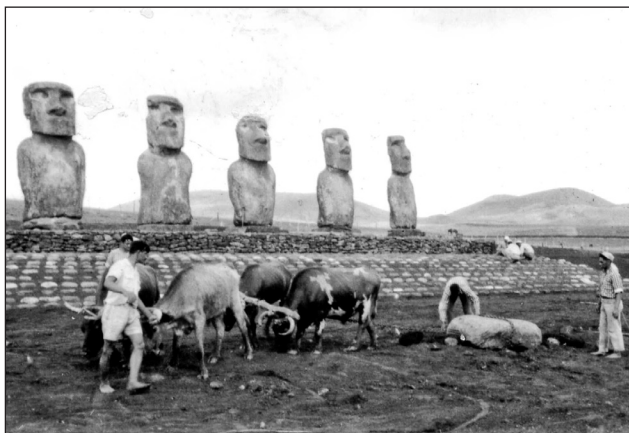


Figure 10. The team of oxen helping to move stones.



Figure 11. The foreman for the Ahu Akivi restoration project, Herman Hotu.

platform with a beautifully terraced plaza as they had been in ancient times. It was a stunningly emotional and empowering sight for everyone. There was a swelling of pride in the magnificent work of the ancient Rapanui ancestors and pride in the meticulous work of restoration done by the Rapanui archaeological crew. Ahu Akivi's restoration was truly a turning point for Rapanui. In my opinion, the Rapa Nui cultural renaissance really started there with this surge of pride in past and present.

Many archaeological restorations of *ahu* sites would follow in future years, including Tahai, 'Anakena, and Tongariki, all beautiful in their own way but none can compare to Ahu Akivi. Because of the time and conditions that existed when its restoration was undertaken, Ahu Akivi is unique. There were no motorized vehicles of any kind, no trucks, and no cranes, not even electricity. Bill Mulloy, Gonzalo Figueroa and their crew rode the 5.5km on horseback from Hangaroa to the site every day. The work was done with only the most basic tools; shovels, picks, winches, ropes and a few oil drums. They had a pair of oxen that helped occasionally with the heavy pulling (Figure 10). Since it was the first time statues had been repaired and re-erected, the crew had to figure out how to do it and experimented with ancient Rapanui systems and modern construction techniques (Figure 11, Figure 12, Figure 13). It was an amazing collaboration where Rapanui and archaeologists all learned from each other and developed a deep and lasting mutual respect.



Figure 12. Using the tripod pulley to raise the statue head.

When Bill Mulloy came to Rapa Nui in 1960 to work on Ahu Akivi, he had more than archaeology in mind. During his stay there four years previously with Heyerdahl's Norwegian Expedition, he had literally fallen in love with the island. Of course he was fascinated with Rapa Nui's unique history and archaeology, but much more importantly he developed a life long respect for and dedication to the Rapanui people. He recognized that restoring some of the ancient sites and creating an outdoor archaeological museum could help create an economic future for the islanders. He believed in Rapanui becoming historians, archaeologists and national park guides and hosting the international visitors he envisioned coming to see the amazing archaeological sites. He thought that archaeology could fuel the economic base that would raise the islanders from their extreme poverty and isolation.

The idea of celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Ahu Akivi came about the year before when Sergio Rapu and I met Carlos Paoa at Vinapu. During our conversation about Bill Mulloy's contributions to Rapa Nui archaeology, Carlos reminded us that the 49th anniversary of Ahu Akivi's restoration was just a few days away. We went out to Ahu Akivi on October 12, 2009 where, along with Bill Mulloy's granddaughter Josie Nahoe, we toasted the seven *moai* with a bottle of champagne and committed to return to celebrate the 50th Anniversary.

The 50th Anniversary of Ahu Akivi was also of course the 50th Anniversary of the Mulloy family's year on Rapa Nui in 1960. Josie Nahoe Mulloy and her husband Ramon

Edmunds made a huge contribution to the on-island organization and planning. Kathy Mulloy and I were both involved in the planning and participated in the celebration. My husband Claud Sutcliffe and I brought the 100 Ahu Akivi t-shirts from Hawai'i to give away. Mulloy cousins Pat and Rory Gilbert and Christy Strauch, who were visiting the island for the first time after hearing about it for 50 years, brought Ahu Akivi posters and pictures to give to the honored elders. Mike Beede, who worked with Bill Mulloy on Rapa Nui in the early 70s, came from Venezuela to lend his support. Rapa Nui families who have been dear friends of the Mulloys for over 50 years helped in large and small ways to make the Ahu Akivi celebration a success. Extra special thanks to Tuti Lillo and all of Vai Te Mihi, the Rapa Nui dance and musical group who prepared the *umu tahu* and special thanks to our brother Vito for all the *athleta* chickens and sweet potatoes. It was wonderful how everyone was related; Charlie and Angie were there with their daughter Pua, who is a great-granddaughter to Maria Rapu, who lived with us in 1960. Francisco Torres and Lilian Lopez at the museum and Mulloy library copied all the beautiful Ahu Akivi photographs and gave us their full support. Bill and Emily Mulloy were there in spirit along with their dear friend and colleague Gonzalo Figueroa. Emily Mulloy's many fascinating letters from 1960 helped us remember and share details; her description of the original Ahu Akivi blessing guided the planning for the very special anniversary celebration.

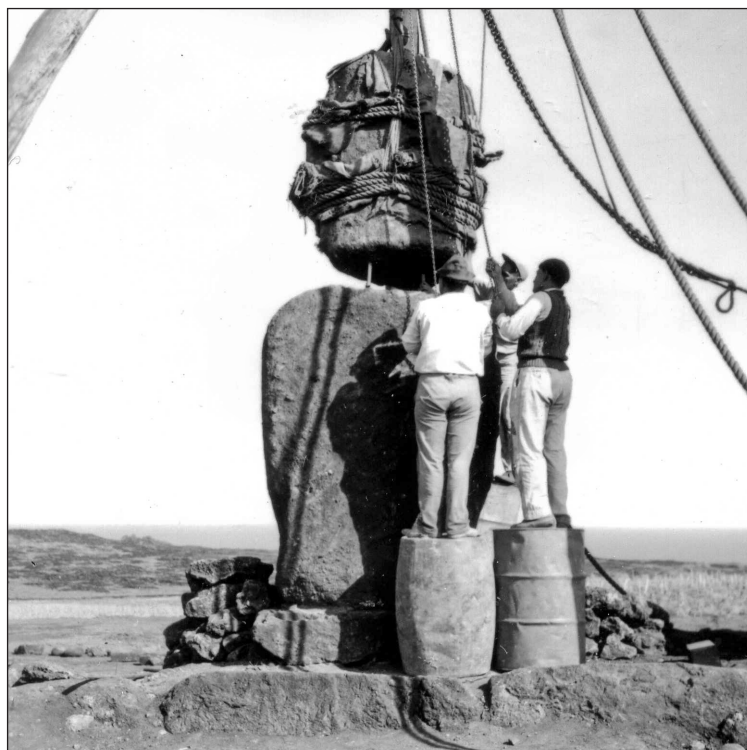


Figure 13. Carefully placing the head on the statue body, note brass reinforcing bars to secure the head.